

Caring for a Loved One

If you are acting as a caregiver for a family member or friend, you are not alone. About one in four adult Canadians give some kind of care to a loved one who needs support.

Long-term caregiving can be a big job. The needs of the person being cared for and those of their caregiver can grow and change over time. You may need to help your loved one access other supports. You will also have to figure out how to balance caregiving with the other responsibilities in your life.

Here are some tips to help you get you started.

Practical Help

Practical help is where many caregivers start: doing laundry, bringing in groceries, or driving the person to appointments. It may help to:

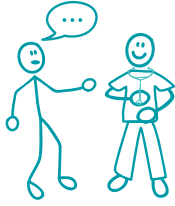
- **Talk about what’s needed, and what you can do:** It’s hard to have to rely on others. It can feel like losing control of your life. So, when possible, let your loved one decide what they need rather than taking over.

Here’s an example:



“My mom needs help with shopping and some cleaning. But she insists she can do laundry and cook her own dinner. I can see that it’s important for her to keep doing whatever she can.”

- **Make a list of tasks:** A to-do list can be shared with anyone else who is giving support. It’s also good for health care providers to understand what is already being done and where more help is needed.
- **Make a schedule:** You can’t schedule everything in life, but it can help both you and your loved one to set a regular time to do chores, especially if you don’t live together. Setting a schedule for activities like getting groceries and visiting the pharmacy will make it easier for you to plan the other activities in your life. Your loved one will also know when you will visit.



Advocating for your loved one with health care professionals

Support with medical care is another important role many caregivers take on. Being an advocate for your loved one is communicating with health professionals and asking questions so you understand their treatment plan. It's also helping to make health decision with your loved one. You may be able to help by:

- **Sharing information:**
Write down symptoms or questions before an appointment, or take notes during the appointment for your loved one. You may be also able to give important information about your loved one's condition. Feel free to ask questions to be sure you both understand the situation, or to express concerns about their care.
- **Looking into other care options:**
Every province and territory has its own system of supports for people who need care at home or extra health services. You can find out what services are available in your area and who has access to them. If the doctor is not able to refer you, the public health department is a good place to start your search. Some examples of possible services are Meals on Wheels, Adult Day Centres, and Home Care services. You can also visit the Health Canada website at www.healthcanada.gc.ca or call toll free at **1-866-225-0709**.
- **Being aware of privacy issues:**
If your loved one is an adult who is able to make their own decisions, health care workers are not able to share health care information with you unless your loved one has given permission. The same privacy policy applies to banking and government services.



Looking after yourself

Long-term caregiving is a marathon, not a sprint. While being a caregiver, you also need to keep yourself healthy and avoid “burnout.” Some things to consider:

- **Who can help you and how?**

Perhaps a supportive friend who is a good listener, a helpful partner who can help out more at home or maybe a relative who can share the caregiving tasks. There are also respite programs. These are programs that loved ones can attend to give caregivers a temporary break.

Here’s an example:



“Looking after a child with autism had worn me out, but I couldn’t leave him with anyone else. The respite program saved the day. For two days a month he stays with people who really understand autism and have gotten to know him, and I get a break.”

- **What will happen if your loved one’s condition gets worse – or if the change in your loved one’s condition makes it difficult for you to continue to provide care?**

Discussing this possibility with the medical team will help you put a plan in place so you don’t have to worry and you can be prepared.



Being a caregiver to a loved one can be rewarding and can bring you closer together, but it can also be very challenging. Let health professionals know if you feel overloaded. You may also want to connect with an online support group like www.caregiverexchange.ca, where you can find helpful resources including videos.